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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004232

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: 19 IRAQI PALESTINIANS IN NO MAN'S LAND AT AL
WALEED FORESHADOW FURTHER FLIGHTS

REF: KANESHIRO-HILL EMAIL OF 10/10/2005

Classified By: Counselor for Political Affairs Robert S.
Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) Summary. Christian Peacemakers Team (CPT) told RefCoord and PolOff that the 19 Palestinians in the No Man's Land between the Iraqi and Syrian land borders fled because of an upsurge in abuse of Palestinians by the ITG and the general public. CPT was unable to provide specific details on alleged incidents. RefCoord cautioned CPT that resettlement outside of Syria is unlikely. More of Iraq's 23,000 Palestinians may try to flee by the same route, especially if the 19 are successful in getting into Syria. End Summary.

(C) From Baghdad to Al Waleed

2. (C) On October 11, Beth Pyles of Christian Peacemakers Team (CPT) discussed the plight of the 19 Palestinians currently located in the No Man's Land between the Iraqi and Syrian land borders with RefCoord and PolOff. The group includes 7 men, 5 women, and 7 children between the ages of 1 and 13. CPT members accompanied these Palestinians from Baghdad across Al Anbar province to the Al Waleed border point. They did not encounter any military along the road to the border as their route passed to the South of the Western Euphrates River Valley operation that was ongoing at the time. The group subsequently obtained tents and has been camping between the borders for about a week. The Syrians have to date refused to admit the Palestinians. Per the Amman RefCoord, UNRWA and UNHCR Syria are engaging the SARG on this issue (ref).

(C) Motivation for the Move

3. (C) According to Pyles, an alleged recent increase in abuse was the last straw motivating these Palestinians to decide they could no longer stay in Iraq. Pyles said the group felt they were better off anywhere else, and they were not prepared to delay their trip to investigate available alternatives. Pyles said the Palestinians have no one to turn to for help since UNHCR relocated to Amman. PolOff requested specific details about the dates, circumstances, and victims of the alleged abuse, which Pyles was unable to provide. Post will seek to meet with Palestinian representatives to obtain more precise information about these as-yet unsubstantiated reports of abuse (septel).

4. (SBU) A UNHCR note to the file dated October 13 states that the reason for the move is reported to be intimidation and growing pressure against the Palestinians in Baghdad. According to information available to UNHCR, Palestinians have been targeted by state and non-state actors since the fall of the former regime and suffer increasingly difficult conditions including harassment, physical attacks, and murders, arbitrary detention, gun shooting in their houses, false accusations in the media, kidnapping, as well as additional difficulties resulting from their uncertain legal status in Iraq.

(SBU) Anywhere But Iraq

5. (SBU) Pyles indicated that the group was interested in a durable solution outside of Iraq. Pyles said the group had heard favorable reports about life for Palestinians in Syria. However, she acknowledged that, if they are allowed into Syria, these Palestinians will probably approach UNHCR about resettlement. RefCoord advised Pyles that UNHCR Syria and UNRWA are the proper authorities to assist these Palestinians, and they are already engaged on the issue. RefCoord also cautioned Pyles that resettlement outside of Syria is unlikely, as no country has yet been willing to accept the similarly-situated Palestinians currently in the

Ruweished refugee camp in Jordan.

(SBU) Foreshadowing Future Flights

16. (SBU) Pyles mentioned that the Iraqi Palestinians at the border are in phone contact with an unknown number of others who had planned to make the trip but changed their minds at the last minute due to security concerns. These individuals reportedly regret the decision to stay behind, and intend to follow at a later date.

17. (SBU UNHCR's October 13 Note to the File indicates that UNAMI Baghdad has suggested talking points to the SRSG to raise with the Prime Minister of Iraq the situation of the 19 Palestinians blocked at the Iraqi-Syrian border and call for urgent action to protect the Palestinian community to stop them from leaving Iraq. According to the note, the matter will also be pursued by UNAMI Humanitarian and Human Rights Offices with various ministries in Iraq.

(SBU) Comment

18. (C) Begin comment: If UNHCR Syria and UNRWA succeed in convincing the SARG to admit these 19 Palestinians, others are likely to follow in their footsteps. Unless the SARG is willing to tolerate a steady flow of new Palestinian refugees, we may soon face the same sort of humanitarian crisis we previously faced with the Al Tash Iranian Kurds and Iraqi Palestinians stuck in the No Man's Land between Iraq and Jordan. RefCoord will consult with UNAMI, UNHCR Iraq, and MODM's Office of Palestinian Affairs to explore protection concerns of this vulnerable population (septel).
Khalilzad